

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to comment on proposed rule changes currently being considered by the FCC to allow the use of cellular telephones aboard airborne aircraft. As a frequent, long-distance business traveller, I would like to express my opposition to such changes. While permitting cellular access in flight would no doubt provide increased convenience for some people, that convenience would come at the cost of considerable inconvenience to many others. Long distance travel, particularly intercontinental travel, can be an exhausting and stressful activity, in which opportunities for needed sleep or work time are rare and precious. The prospect of having those opportunities interrupted by constant cell phone conversations is not one I relish. In my experience, even normally quiet people talk at volumes far above normal conversational levels when they are using a cell phone. And the most inconsiderate users, of which there are no small number, practically yell into their phones--often for extended periods. When I encounter a loud cell phone user on the ground, I have the option of moving away to a comfortable distance. Passengers on airplanes do not have that option. They are, by and large, confined to their seats. Given the increasingly close seating on planes, a single caller could interfere with the sleep, work, or simply the relaxation of dozens of people. Because cell phones are now ubiquitous and calls cheap or free, potential users on flights would include not only business travellers, but also lovesick teenagers, and bored children. Even were cell phone users subjected to time and noise limits (neither of which could feasibly be enforced by harried flight attendants), passengers could be subjected to an endless series of petty--or not so petty--intrusions on their peace, increasing stress levels, reducing productivity, and generally making flying a more unpleasant experience for everyone. In my opinion, any purported economic or commercial benefits from in-flight cell phone use are far outweighed by these negative impacts.

Nor do I think permitting cell phone use in an enclosed, sound-proofed area onboard the plane would be a real option. Any such area would likely come at the expense of already overtaxed storage and restroom space in the economy classes. Moreover, keeping callers quiet outside any prescribed phone booth would be extremely difficult in practice.

Most commercial flights already provide card-operated cell phones for use by passengers in dire need. While calls on these phones are not cheap, they are not prohibitively expensive for occasional use; and the high cost reduces the likelihood that people will make calls unless they have a genuine need.

Thank you for your consideration,

William Carroll Muffett